

## Gallaudet U., flagship school for the deaf, announces new president

By **Nick Anderson** October 9



Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. (Matthew Vita/Gallaudet)

---

Gallaudet University trustees said Friday they have chosen a foundation executive from Minnesota with expertise in community programs to become the next president of the nation's premier college for the deaf and heard of hearing.

Roberta "Bobbi" Cordano, vice president of programs for the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation in St. Paul, will take over in January as the 11th president of the school in Northeast Washington founded during the Civil War.

"It really does take a village to make a president," Cordano said at a campus event with a live Web transcription. "Which means all of you, I expect you to support me in the success of my presidency as we move forward."

At the foundation, she oversees programs for nearly 9,500 people in areas, such as early childhood, community mental health, family supportive housing, aging and caregiver services, school reform and food access. She has also held administrative positions at the University of Minnesota and was an assistant attorney general for Minnesota.



Roberta "Bobbi" Cordano  
(courtesy Gallaudet)

Cordano, 51, who is deaf, holds a bachelor's degree from Beloit College in Wisconsin and a law degree from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She will succeed the outgoing T. Alan Hurwitz, who has led Gallaudet since January 2010.

Cordano was chosen from a group of three finalists announced in August. The other two were Pamela Lloyd-Ogoke, a North Carolina vocational rehabilitation official, and Annette Reichman, director of the Office of Special Institutions in the U.S. Department of Education.

The 1,500-student university was federally chartered in 1864 under the signature of President Abraham Lincoln. It receives a special appropriation from Congress — about \$120 million a year — for its mission as a center of higher learning for the deaf. The federal funding accounts for about two thirds of annual operating revenue.

Gallaudet did not have its first deaf president until a 1988 student uprising shut down the campus. “Deaf President Now,” as the protest became known, was a watershed for the deaf community. The demonstrators wanted the world to know the only thing deaf people can't do is hear.

Cordano made a recruiting pitch as she was introduced Friday to the campus by Gallaudet's trustees.

“I want to speak to all of those deaf students or hard of hearing students and deaf-blind students who are thinking about coming to Gallaudet, and you think you want to learn here,” she said. “I invite you to come. Please do come to this wonderful university. Make it your home. Come learn and grow here with us.”

Heather Harker, chair of the Board of Trustees, said: “As our students are connecting with our vibrant community, discovering their academic and career aspirations, and influencing conversations and their futures, Ms. Cordano will be the kind of president to lead transformational change at the university. She's the right person at the right time for Gallaudet.”